

# Historicising the dynamics of intergroup relations between the Kuteb and Ichen people of Southern Taraba in North-eastern Nigeria, 1900-2022

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**ABSTRACT:** Research on inter-group relations in the Southern part of Taraba State, Nigeria is relatively new because Nigerian scholars are more concerned with researching global topics or major ethnic groups while they neglect or give little attention to minority ethnic groups. This has made literature on the subject matter of intergroup relations scarce, hence the need for this study. The study adopts the historical method of research which involves the use of primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary sources include oral interviews and materials from the National Archives Kaduna. Secondary sources used are published books, undergraduate project reports, and internet materials. The findings of this study reveal that the Kuteb and Ichen people of Southern Taraba have for a long time been engaged in inter-ethnic relations which has significantly impacted their development as a people. This study contributes to the broader argument on intergroup relations by providing empirical evidence from the Kuteb and Ichen people. It demonstrates how marriage, economic interactions, and social contacts collectively enhance social cohesion, cultural exchange, and economic interdependence, which are crucial for peaceful and productive intergroup relations. These findings support the view that interdependence and cooperation are inherent in human societies and essential for their development and stability.

**Keywords:** Development, dynamics, Ichen, intergroup relations, Kuteb.

## INTRODUCTION

In his work, "The Igbo and their Neighbours: Inter-group relations in Southeastern Nigeria up to 1953", Afigbo opines that contact between people and cultures is as ancient as human history. He further posits that these contacts or inter-relations spurred human development because inter-group relations presuppose interaction between groups, each of which has the intention to make some input into the relationship (Afigbo, 1987). Inter-relations amongst groups are important because no human society is entirely self-sufficient or can live in autarky. Human and natural resources are not evenly distributed, which explains why what society A may have, society B may lack. For instance, Malaysia is known to be

one of the largest producers and exporters of palm oil (Palmoil World, 2021), Niger Republic on the other hand does not produce palm oil but is said to possess the world's largest uranium deposit. This variation in goods or commodities which these countries produce has necessitated relations between them. Niger Republic depends on Malaysia for most of the palm oil used in the country (World Nuclear Association, 2021). Relations between and among states in the comity of nations also exist between and among ethnic nationalities or stocks that constitute a nation, state or country as such groups must interact, either for good or evil.

The study of intergroup relations between the Kuteb and

Ichen people of Southern Taraba State, Nigeria, is significant. Firstly, it provides an understanding of how these two ethnic groups had historically interacted, traded, and coexisted through the mechanisms of cooperation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on intergroup relations in Nigeria, offering a microcosmic view of the dynamics that can be found in other parts of Nigeria. It is on this basis that this paper examines the relations between the Kuteb and Ichen people of Southern Taraba State, Nigeria.

### THE KUTEB: ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

The origin and migration of the Kuteb people have been a subject of debate. This is because the early history of the people like most African societies was not documented until the arrival of the Europeans. Although this study is not intended to examine the different versions of the people's migration histories, it adopts the most convincing migration history which is shrouded in oral tradition and states that Kuteb origin and migration could be traced to the Lake Chad region. This oral tradition continues by throwing light that the Kuteb people were living together with her other Jukun kith and kin who included the Wapan, Ichen, Kpazun, Etulo among others. It was said that because of population explosion in the Lake Chad region due to immigration by other groups which resulted in land scarcity, and the consequence of this was conflict among groups inhabiting this region. The Jukun speaking people called a meeting whose agenda was how to find a lasting solution to the problem of land scarcity they were facing. It was at this meeting that they resolved to emigrate out of the Lake Chad region. The Kuteb and their brothers (Jukun speaking people) left the Lake Chad region and migrated to Fika (A Local Government Area in Yobe State) (Andesati Galadima, 2021: Oral Interview). This tradition goes further to say that it was while at Fika that the Kuteb and their brothers unleashed the first military onslaught that showed their might on Kano.

From Fika, they continued moving and came down through Gana across river Benue to Bie-pi. It is established through oral view conducted, that during this migration Kuteb people and their brothers fought a lot of wars. It was during these wars that the Kuteb people proved their military gallantry which made them outstanding among their brothers. In all the wars they fought (Jukun people), the Kuteb people were at the forefront of the Battle as they fought with vigour. Whenever a battle became fierce, the Kuteb people would start shouting "Korofafae" meaning come closer in your numbers. As their enemies especially the Hausa people heard them shouting korofafae they began to refer to them (Jukun people) as Kororofa because of the difficulty in pronouncing the real word "Korofafae" (Filibus, 2017). When they came and settled at Bie-pi, they established an

empire called Kororofa. Bie-pi where they settled became the capital of Kororofa kingdom (Atose, 2009).

After settling at Bie-pi (that is the capital of the Kororofa kingdom), the different Jukun groups began to expand greatly in large numbers. Consequent to this, land became a scarce commodity among them. It is important to emphasize that most of the Jukun groups are farmers and land is an important factor of production for each of the groups. The Kuteb called on their other brothers and informed them of their plan to leave Bie-pi and relocate to somewhere else where they could settle. This decision of the Kuteb people was supported by other Jukun brothers, especially the Wapan people. The leader of the Wapan people told the Kuteb people "Niken" which literally means "you can go". The Kuteb thereafter embarked on their movement and were led by a man called Kuteb. The Kuteb people arrived at Ussa Hill where they settled. Again, the Kuteb people increased in number greatly and their leader Kuteb in order to avoid conflict over land called on the twelve (12) clans of Kuteb and apportioned each of them to a hill. Thus, the twelve clans and the hill apportioned to them are:

Likam	-	Mbarikam Hill
Akente	-	Akente Hill
Rubur or Jenuwa	-	Rubur Hill
Lissam	-	Likam Hill
Tucwo or Kpambo	-	Tucwo Hill
Rufu	-	Rufu Hill
Lumbu	-	Lumbu Hill
Bika or Zwika	-	Bika Hill
Ayigiben	-	Yukuben Hill
Atswen	-	Atswensi Hill
Acwumam	-	Acwumam Hill
Acha	-	Acha Hill

Furthermore, Kuteb told his people that all the clans must always assemble in the Mbarikam Hill (given to Likam) for all their festivities and religious rites. He appointed a spiritual leader known as "Kukwen" to each of the clans and selected a chief priest (Kwe Kukwen) to whom all other priests from each of those twelve clans must give a situation report. Hence, the Likam settlement became a meeting point for all the Kuteb clans for their religious and social festivities, the Kuteb people began to refer to the Likam settlement as "Teekum" which means "we assemble" (Andetatang Iramae Bika-Babba, 2022: Oral Interview).

### ICHEN ORIGIN AND MIGRATION

Before discussing the socio-cultural and economic relations between the Kuteb and the Ichen people, it is pertinent to trace the history of the Ichen people into the study area as this will help us to understand their

relationship better. Just like the Kuteb people, the Ichen have diverse accounts of their traditions of origin and migration. It is not within the scope of this study to engage or identify the diverse accounts, but the account which is more authentic with facts and evidence is what shall be discussed. An important point that needs to be noted is that the Ichen people are also a sub-group of the Jukunoid.

The origin of the Ichen people could also be traced to Central Africa around the Congo Basin region (Hassan, 2016). From this location, the Ichen people moved with their other Jukun brothers to establish the Kororofa Empire with headquarters at Bie-pi just a few kilometres away from Wukari town. While at Bie-pi, the Kuteb people foresaw that the area was experiencing a population boom and that in the future land would become scarce and there might erupt conflict over competition for the land. Hence, most of the Jukunoid groups were agrarians who needed a large expanse of land to cultivate their crops. The Kuteb people told other Jukunoid groups that they were leaving the Kororofa region to seek for land elsewhere. Thus, the Kuteb people became the first Jukunoid group to leave the Kororofa Empire (Filibus, 2017). Years after the migration of the Kuteb people from the Kororofa Empire, the Ichen people also moved in different groups under the leadership of a “Kuufan” (priest) who was both a spiritual and political leader of the Ichen people and arrived at Takum to meet the Kuteb people who were already settled there. Their movement to Takum was during the reign of Ukwe Ganzu Kwetsa Andejarikwen who ruled from 1775 to 1815 (Irambiya, 2002).

The Ichen migration into Kuteb land was a reunion of brothers who were once settled together in the former Kororofa empire. The migration of the Ichen people to the Takum area was in batches. The first groups who came to settle in Kuteb land were the Ndegwi, Bibinu, Ndakhwa, Beekan and Buban. While in Takum, the Ichen people enjoyed a cordial relationship with their Kuteb brothers for there has never been any record of war or violent conflict between them. In fact, history records that the two groups vowed never to see each other's blood because they are brothers (Elder Simeon Bala Manga, 2021: Oral Interview). The Ichen people are very hardworking and agriculturalists, who engaged in the cultivation of some crops such as guinea corn, maize, and oil palm. Because they were also professional hunters, the forest areas of Takum provided them with lots of games which they hunted (Rev. Philibus Aboki, 2021: Oral Interview).

As time progressed, Ukwe Andejarikwen discovered that the two groups had greatly multiplied in numbers and it seemed that the land in the Takum area was no longer going to be enough for them to cultivate and carry out other agricultural activities. The result of this was a meeting he called in 1810 to address the Ichen people on the above development and a solution to the challenge (Irambiya, 2002). These were the words of Ukwe Andejarikwen:

*My brothers, it was a pleasure welcoming you in our midst. The short period we stayed together was quite harmonious. As I am standing before you today, it bleeds my heart to tell you that it has become necessary for us to stay apart from each other as the land we occupy cannot accommodate all of us and our generation yet unborn. However, wherever you are, a daily intercourse shall exist between us (Irambiya, 2002).*

The message from the Ukwe was well received by the Ichen people and they were neither offended by his speech nor felt that the Ukwe was using gimmicks to send them away. The Ichen people saw the wisdom in his words and since there was still enough vast land outside of Kuteb land, they yielded to the advice of the Ukwe to seek more land elsewhere in order to avert competition between their generations yet unborn. The only pain in the hearts of both the Kuteb and Ichen people was that they were going to miss the cordiality that they had enjoyed living together but since the Ukwe had assured them that a daily intercourse would still exist, it subsided the pain. The Ichen people began a mass movement out of Kuteb land and went eastward with the Ndegwi, Bibinu, Ndakhwa, Beekan and Buban taking the lead. As they moved, they arrived at River Donga and since there was no bridge to aid the crossing of the people, a log of wood (*nyina kana*) was laid from the western bank of the river to the eastern bank to allow the people to cross the river successfully. After the Ichen people had successfully crossed to the eastern bank of River Donga, they settled there and started their normal life and activities. The period of their settlement at the eastern bank of River Donga was 1815-1820 (Irambiya, 2002). As the Ichen people were settled at the eastern bank of River Donga, Modibbo Adama was also spreading the tentacles of his Islamic Jihad, and hence the people were not ready to fight a war at that time, nor were they ready to be colonized or converted to Islam. They, therefore, decided to ascend the hill of Nyivu which was to serve as a shield and protection to the people. At this juncture, it is pertinent to emphasize that the Kuufan (priest) still held sway over the religious and political administration of the Ichen people. By 1845, the Ichen people decided to descend from the Nyivu Hill to the plains between the hill and the eastern bank of River Donga to establish the present-day Nyivu town. Their decision to descend from the hilltop was anchored on the information at their disposal that Modibbo Adama together with his followers had established a capital for himself in Yola (Irambiya, 2002).

After the Ichen people had settled at Nyivu, the harmonious relationship between them and the Kuteb people was further strengthened because of the constant social intercourse between them. Information reached the

Ichen people that the Kuteb people were at war with the Chamba people who had just penetrated Kuteb land to distort the peace that existed in the area through their activities of raiding for foodstuffs and domestic animals. Thus, the Ichen people understood that the peaceful area which had once hosted them had become a zone for conflict and conflagration (Yaro Dauda, 2021: Oral Interview). In consonance with the proverbial expression that states “one good turn deserves another”, the Ichen people felt the great need to render military assistance to the Kuteb people to help curb the menace of the Chamba people. It is in the light of this that the Ichen people assisted the Kuteb people militarily to dislodge Chamba militants from Jenuwa (a Kuteb community) and the guillotine of Yakuba I at Rufu when he Yakuba led some criminal Chamba group to attack Rufu in order to raid for slaves, foodstuffs, livestock and Kuteb women (Irambiya, 2002).

With the process of time, the Ichen society engaged in social interaction with other ethnic groups aside from the Kuteb. This is because some Kpanzun people had moved in from the Kororofa capital to meet the Ichen around the Donga area. More so, some of the Chamba people who were earlier dispersed from Jenuwa moved to the south-eastern bank of River Donga to settle and take refuge. It is important to note that the migration of other groups into the Ichen society brought about a geometric progression in the population of people in the area. This situation led to a drastic change in Ichen land because the society became more complex and so the Kuufan (priest) could no longer handle his position effectively. With the new complexity which has emerged in the society, it became imperative for the seeming absolute powers of the Kuufan to be diffused to another individual who would handle political and administrative issues while the Kuufan concentrated on religious matters. This was the genesis of the “Tih” institution. The Tih became the individual who was delegated with the powers to handle political, civil and social affairs in the Ichen society. By 1898, the Tih institution had been established and two ruling families were mandated to ascend the Tih throne; the Kunda and Akugbwe families (Irambiya, 2002).

Just when the Ichen people settled down to build up their newly established traditional institution, the Wukari Division was created in Donga District (Kentu District) in 1920 with the headquarters at Donga (Irambiya, 2002). An important point to note is that, prior to the creation of Donga District, the Sama clan of the Chamba people under the leadership of one Doo Shimbura Garkiye incited war against the Kuteb people at Jenuwa but the Jenuwa clan of the Kuteb were able to repel their attack and drove them away. Driven by the Jenuwa clan of the Kuteb people, the Sama clan of the Chamba people came to settle at Donga with a chief which they called *Gara*. As Donga was made the headquarters of Kentu District by the colonial invaders, all other village heads became subservient and

answerable to the *Gara* (Dewar, 1935). The worst form of injustice was perpetrated against the Ichen people with the creation of Donga District (Kentu District) and its headquarters in Donga. In addition to the injustice was the elevation of the Chamba chief above the Tih of the Ichen people, making the Tih answerable to the *Gara*. While being subservient to the *Gara* of Donga, the Ichen people suffered lots of human rights abuses from Chamba chiefs. Thus, Innocent Irambiya quoted an Ichen man who maintained that his name be kept anonymous, thus:

*The Chamba people exerted every form of extortion on us the Ichen people and later renamed us Kentu. In those dark days of the Chamba rule, they cornered everything and relied heavily on us for the provision of guinea corn, these were forcefully taken from us without payment. On annual basis the Chamba Chief of Donga would send his Dogaris to our settlement on pretext of collecting tax and go away with our food. Anyone of us who was recalcitrant was forced to the Chief's house where cow hides skin was generously used on bare buttocks (Irambiya, 2002).*

The above painted scenario represented the kind of oppression the Ichen people suffered at the hands of the Chamba chiefs who governed Donga. In 1949, an Ichen man was brave enough to question the legality of the actions of the *Gara* on the Ichen people (Irambiya, 2002). His decision to challenge the *Gara* was precipitated by an experience he had on his farmland. While he was on his guinea corn farm weeding grasses, he was stung by a scorpion and while in pain, he swore to himself that he would never allow anyone to come collect or seize his farm produce in the name of tax collection. At the season when harvest approached, the *Gara* of Donga sent his *Dogaris* as usual for the annual tax collection. When the *Dogaris* arrived at the man's residence, he clearly spelt out to the King's messengers that he was not going to pay a dime from his farm produce, he went further to question the authority of the *Gara* and described his reign as illegal. At this point, it is important to state that the man's name was Manya while the *Gara* of Donga at this period was Mohammed Sambo Garbosa, who ordered that Manya be immediately arrested and brought before his royal court (Irambiya, 2002). The chief instructed that Manya be stripped naked and flogged on his bare buttocks, after which he was to be detained for three days to serve as a deterrence to whosoever was planning on rebelling against the authority of the *Gara* (Bwenu Luka, 2020: Oral Interview).

The action of the *Gara* in punishing Manya further exacerbated his hatred for the Chamba people. He felt that the worst humiliation that could be meted out to a man like

himself was to be stripped naked and flogged at public gaze. Because Manya could not stand the shame and disgrace unleashed on him by Gara Mohammed Sambo Garbosa, he decided to leave Nyivu with his family and some followers crossing River Donga to settle in Manya (few kilometres away from Takum), a settlement which he established, and named after him. Before Manya left Nyivu, he recollected the good old days his ancestors had enjoyed while in Kuteb land (Bwenu Luka, 2020: Oral Interview). Although he was not born at that time, he could imagine such cordial relations through the stories which he had been told by his parents. After Manya had left Nyivu with his family and followers to establish another settlement, the Gara was infuriated by the decision and action of Manya. He ordered his guards to go in search of Manya and make sure that Manya was brought before him to face another punishment for being recalcitrant. As fate would have it, while the Gara's guards were approaching Manya in search of Manya, information reached him that he was wanted by the Gara. On receiving the information, Manya quickly ran away from Manya with his family to Takum where his ancestors had lived. By the time the Gara's guards arrived Manya's settlement, Manya had left (Irambiya, 2002).

On his arrival at Takum, Manya headed for the palace of the Ukwe. At this period Ukwe Audu Gyaa Gankwe II was the reigning Ukwe from the Likam clan of the Kuteb people. Manya was very succinct in explaining to the Ukwe the ordeals the Ichen people had been experiencing at the hands of the Gara. He also explained to the Ukwe his experience and how he managed to escape. Ukwe Audu Gyaa became sympathetic and empathic after listening to the story narrated to him by Manya of his personal bitter experience and those of his people. He wondered how a man could inflict pain on his fellow human beings on account of power drunkenness. To bring a lasting solution to the problem, Ukwe Audu mandated that Manya should accompany him to see the Divisional Officer in Wukari at his residence. On their arrival to Wukari, Manya was asked to narrate his story which the Divisional officer listened to carefully. After giving an audience to Manya, the Divisional officer sent for Gara Garbosa Sambo. He arrived at the residence of the Divisional Officer and met Manya together with Ukwe Audu, it was a surprise for him because he neither expected nor imagined such a scenario or encounter. With the presence of the Gara, Manya was asked to recount all he had said which he did and in fairness and equity of right to fair hearing, the Gara was asked to respond to the allegations against him. After due cross examination of the matter, the Divisional Officer gave a serious warning to the Gara not to repeat such a dastardly act. Ukwe Audu and Manya left for Takum that same day. The next day Manya thanked the Ukwe for his fatherly role and assistance towards him and his followers. He told the Ukwe that he would be relocating to Manya with his followers to fully establish their settlement

(Irambiya, 2002).

Not long after issues were settled between Manya and the Gara, another Ichen man by the name Mallam Ikpi also disagreed with the Gara on the Gara's decision to install a puppet as Tih Nyivu after the death of Tih Garefwa. It is important to state that Mallam Ikpi was the Madaki of Tih Garefwa and he had always opposed the Gara on several instances. All efforts by Mallam Ikpi to stop the Gara from installing Kankywa Tihbwaichen as Tih failed and he resorted to rebelling against the Gara. The same punishment that was meted out to Manya was equally unleashed on Mallam Ikpi. Mallam Ikpi on getting back to Nyivu moved his family with the intention of going to Takum to meet Ukwe Audu Gyaa to allow him to settle in Takum. While on his way to Takum, he met Manya and narrated everything that transpired between himself and the Gara. Manya advised him not to see the Ukwe, but should rather settle with him there in Manya to build a more united chiefdom. Mallam Ikpi saw the voice of wisdom in Manya's submission which he heeded. After the death of Manya, Mallam Ikpi ascended the throne as Tih Manya. It is necessary to reiterate that the Ichen people were the first group to join the Kuteb people in the Takum area and then migrated to Nyivu to establish their settlement. But with the play out of some events which have been narrated above, some groups of the Ichen people re-migrated to Kuteb land to establish the Manya settlement (Irambiya, 2002).

At this point, it is necessary to articulate that the Ichen people's re-migration from Nyivu to Takum Chiefdom was anchored on the already established cordial and peaceful relationship that existed between the two ethnic groups. The social interaction among the Ichen and Kuteb people was cemented by the principle of respect for each other and brotherliness. In an interview with an Ichen elder statesman, Elder Manga Simeon Bala, he stated that the Kuteb and Ichen people were/are not just neighbours but brothers/kindred, that was the reason the two groups vowed never to see each other's blood or for them to go into war against each other (Elder Simeon Bala Manga, 2021: Oral Interview). This explains why Kuteb elders had to plead for forgiveness from Ichen elders on account of the killing of two Ichen men during the Kuteb-Chamba crisis of 2008. Kuteb people perceived that the two men in question were leaking information to Chamba warriors during the crisis. Some sacrifices were made to atone for the act and reconciliation between the Kuteb and Ichen was established (Rev. Philibus Aboki, 2021: Oral Interview).

The social interaction between the two groups has never experienced violence but full of jokes. It is common practice to see a Kuteb man teasing and calling an Ichen man a "run-away slave" which refers to the period the Ichen people left Takum for Nyivu. The Ichen man in response will call the Kuteb man "Zompere" which signifies that the Kuteb man feeds on human flesh. He may

even further add that the Kuteb man is an archaic being and it was the Ichen people that brought the Kuteb people down from the mountain top to be civilized but civilization has eluded the Kuteb man. The Kuteb man in a sarcastic tune will narrate the story of an Ichen woman who went to the top of a mountain to dry frozen palm oil but by dawn when she came back to pack the oil, it had melted. To further prove to the Ichen man that he is more civilized than him, the Kuteb man will also narrate how the Ichen people out of surprise will go to the newly constructed Takum-Mararaba Road to have a view of the tared road with the expression “nasara bwe mamaki”, which means the white man is full of wonders. If the Ichen man wants to cross the tarred road, he removes his shoes in order not to dirty it. This has been how the two groups make fun of themselves as they interact (Abinawa Bwaseh, 2020: Oral Interview).

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KUTEB AND ICHEN PEOPLE**

At this point, we shall look at some factors in specifics that serve as a point of interaction between the Kuteb people and the Ichen people. One of such is the institution of marriage. There have been records of marriage alliances between the Kuteb people and the Ichen people. Inter-ethnic marriage is pertinent for development. It is an affinal relationship between two persons and at some other times, between not just two persons but between two families or groups with diverse cultural orientations. It is important to argue that from the days of traditional Africa, wife taking and wife giving have been an event of serious social commitment. Apart from serving as an establishment for a further procreation system, marriage is also a social activity for security, peace and goodwill among the parties concerned. Thus, Achebe (1958) noted that a maiden is given to a neighbouring village in the traditional setting to broker peace between the two villages. It is not that such female folks are used as sacrificial lambs, but that they carry the ambience of love that can be respected by the other party (Achebe, 1958). The children who are the product of the inter-ethnic marriage become attached to their parent's ethnic group such that social integration is achieved.

This is also the case with the Kuteb and Ichen people; Kuteb men marry Ichen women and vice versa. These inter-marriages have further strengthened the ties between the two groups (Rimamsikwe Luka, 2021: Oral Interview). While speaking with Elder Manga, an Ichen man who married a Kuteb woman from the Lissam (Askean) clan, he was apt to say that his conjugal bliss has produced wonderful children for them both male and children. In his opinion, the family of his wife is now his family and vice versa. He further stated that their union has made him learn how to consume most of the Kuteb delicacies prepared by his wife and his wife has also learnt

how to prepare most of the Ichen delicacies (Elder Simeon Bala Manga, 2021: Oral Interview). Another example is the union of the Late Mr Ikoti Kiffen from Kwambai (a Kuteb community) who got married to the Late Mrs Adama Dadi Jatau from Gayama (an Ichen community) in the year 1954 (Lazarus Ikoti, 2023; Oral interview). These are examples that could be gleaned from inter-marriages between the Kuteb and Ichen people and its impact on their social development. It is worthy of note that when it comes to the issue of inter-marriage between the two groups (Kuteb and Ichen), there are instances whereby the issue of dowry is waved especially when a Kuteb man has a daughter and a son and are both ripe for marriage, he may just come into an understanding with an Ichen man in a similar position, and their children are joined in marriage.

Naming ceremonies are important socio-cultural events for both the Kuteb and Ichen people, serving as a vital point of interaction. During such events, families from both groups come together, exchanging gifts and blessings. This fostered a sense of unity and strengthened familial bonds across ethnic lines. The communal celebration often includes feasting, music, and dance, creating a joyful atmosphere that reinforces social cohesion. The Ichen usually participate in Kuteb naming ceremonies and vice versa (Yaro Dauda, 2021; Oral Interview).

The introduction of Western education played a crucial role in bridging the socio-cultural gap between the Kuteb and Ichen in the Takum area. Schools and educational institutions served as melting pots where children from both groups interacted, learned, and grew together. Joint educational activities, such as sports, cultural festivals, and academic competitions, provided opportunities for students to build friendships and understand each other's cultures. The establishment of schools Mbiya Secondary School (now Reformed Combine School), Government Secondary School Takum, and College of Health Technology Takum among others became a melting pot where the Kuteb and Ichen interacted.

Another point of socio-cultural interaction between the Kuteb and Ichen is through cultural festivities. One of such festival that brought and cemented the relations of the two groups is the Kuchicheb cultural festival celebrated every 25th of March yearly. Kuchicheb is a cultural festival among the Kuteb people which signifies a thanksgiving for harvest. The event usually brings together members of the Kuteb ethnic group. Every year, they assemble at Mbarkam/Takum to perform religious and social activities to demonstrate the spirit of togetherness (Williams, 2015). Kuchicheb festival also helped to build harmony among the Kuteb and other ethnic groups. It equally served as a means of entertainment, showcasing cultural heritage, building friendships in new relations, creating a form of partnership, and creating jobs and investment into Kuteb land. Similarly, it served greatly as a means of social interaction, building existing bonds and creating new ones. These bonds went beyond the shores of Kuteb land and

were possibly expected to last for a lifetime. During the festival, dances such as “sae kwob”, “sae wyen”, “sae iki”, “sae goge”, “sae, tagba” and “sae kumburu” among others, with drums being played alongside the Kutumbu (local trumpet) (Atando and Ukwon, 2020).

During the Kuchicheb festival, the Ichen groups are invited formally through their traditional rulers and stakeholders. The Ichen are also given opportunities to showcase their cultural dances such as “geh eteh” and “geh kpu” to the audience that gathered during the festival. The Kuchicheb festival thus played a crucial role in fostering socio-cultural interactions between the Kuteb and Ichen. It was a time for both groups to come together, celebrate their harvest, and reinforce their relationships through shared cultural practices and festivities.

## ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

Economically, the Kuteb and Ichen also interacted because none of the groups had all it needed. It is important to point out that the two groups originally practised subsistence agriculture. The Kuteb and Ichen both engaged in the production and cultivation of similar crops. For instance, *Awum* (guinea corn) is one of the principal crops cultivated by the Kuteb and Ichen people because of its economic and nutritional value (Hassan, 2016). The Ichen people call guinea corn *fhfh* in their language (Yaro Dauda, 2021: Oral Interview). Guinea corn is used by the Ichen and Kuteb people for the preparation of food (swallow), the Kuteb name for this processed guinea corn food is *iraen awum* (Jerusha Galadima, 2020: Oral Interview). while the Ichen people call it *dwa fhfh* (Yaro Dauda, 2021: Oral Interview). There are times when a Kuteb man could exchange his guinea corn yield for a game that has been hunted by the Ichen man. Ichen people are known to be professional hunters. Aside from the fact that guinea corn is used for the preparation of food, it is also required for the brewing of the indigenous liquor known as “jwab” in Kuteb language and “tson” in Ichen language (Chwanu Sale, 2021: Oral Interview). This liquor or locally brewed alcohol was consumed by both the Kuteb and the Ichen people and it served as a unifying factor between the two groups. Both Kuteb and Ichen women are known to produce this local alcohol (Rimamsikwe Luka, 2021: Oral Interview). As stated above, the joints where jwab or tson is sold, serve as an interaction point for the Kuteb and Ichen people. Through these joints, some Ichen men were able to see Kuteb girls whom they admired, and the result was inter-marriage, the same was applied to Kuteb men who visited the joints owned by Ichen women. It must be noted that these joints served as a means for the dissemination of important information. In these joints, discussions were raised and the people contributed intellectually, thus, there was the development of social interaction (Chwanu Sale, 2021: Oral Interview). Other

products which the Kuteb and Ichen people traded or bartered with included palm products, maize, rice, millets among many others. It is germane to bring to the fore that the aforementioned crops are cultivated by the two groups and the exchange or trade of these products is based on the need of an individual from any of the groups because an individual cannot be able to farm all these crops (Yaro Dauda, 2021: Oral Interview).

There are also products in which the two groups traded in but which none of them produced, for instance, ivory, gum, and kola. All the ivory, gum and kola purchased by the Royal Niger Company came from Barfum through Takum (Kuteb land) and were dutiable at 2% because they originated from the German territory (Hewby, 1902). The point of emphasis here is that most Kuteb merchants travelled to Barfum which was then a German territory in Cameroon, to buy these products and brought them to Takum before transporting them to Ibi and then sold to the Royal Niger Company. Most times when these products got to Takum, some Ichen merchants also came to Takum to buy some of these goods, to also transport them to Ibi or for their consumption. It was because of this that Takum became a traffic point attracting a lot of people including some of the Ichen people who came back to settle in Takum town to carry out their business activities. It is important to state here that, these products from Barfum usually passed through Tohso which is also a Kuteb community before they arrived Takum. When these products arrived at Takum, the Ukwé levied a duty of about 5% on kola (Hewby, 1902).

The economic relations between the Kuteb and Ichen people are further rooted in their agricultural practices, which go beyond mere trade interactions. One of the principal aspects of their farming activities is the cultivation of cocoa, banana, plantain, palm trees, and maize. The Ichen are known to farm cocoa in larger quantities than the Kuteb, while the Kuteb cultivate maize in larger quantities than the Ichen (Andesati Galadima, 2021: Oral Interview). This specialization allowed for a symbiotic relationship, where each group could trade surplus crops to meet their respective needs. The emphasis on maize cultivation by the Kuteb is significant due to the versatility and importance of the crop in their diet. Maize is a staple food, used in their various traditional dishes. The surplus maize produced by the Kuteb often serves as a critical trade commodity, exchanged with the Ichen for cocoa or other crops. This exchange ensures that both groups benefit from a diverse diet and economic stability. Aside from trade by barter, the Kuteb and Ichen engaged in the buying and selling of these products to other areas. Kuteb merchants go to Ichen communities like Abong and Baissa to buy cocoa and sell to companies in need of cocoa who had their agents in Takum town ready to purchase. Additionally, the cultivation of bananas and plantain by both groups contributed to their dietary needs and economic interactions. These crops are rich in essential

nutrients and are traded between the Kuteb and Ichen to complement their food supplies. Palm trees, another critical crop, provide palm oil, which is essential for cooking and other domestic uses. Both the Kuteb and Ichen engaged in the production of palm oil, creating another avenue for economic exchange. The trade of palm oil between the Kuteb and Ichen ensured that this vital resource is available to both groups (Abinawa Bwaseh, 2020: Oral Interview).

It is important to note that these agricultural products were not only traded through barter but also bought and sold using currency. This dual system of exchange allowed for greater flexibility in their economic interactions. The use of currency facilitated transactions when direct barter was not feasible, enabling both the Kuteb and Ichen to participate in a broader market economy. This practice enhanced their economic relations, as it allowed for the accumulation and utilization of monetary resources in addition to their agricultural surplus.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that ever since the period of early migration of both the Kuteb and Ichen people, there has been significant interaction between the two groups which has shaped their history over time. This paper has shown that the fundamental need of man is the provision of material goods which compels cooperation with others in production and consumption relationships, for access to scarce resources, in turn, has made contact and interaction inevitable. Furthermore, inter-relation, contact, interaction, interconnection and interdependence among individuals and groups of people (nations) is not only a fact of life but a constant phenomenon as has been seen in the case of the Kuteb and Ichen people.

Socio-cultural interactions have played a crucial role in cementing the relationship between the Kuteb and Ichen. Naming ceremonies, marriage, and festivals like the Kuchicheb have provided platforms for mutual respect, support, and cultural exchange. These events have not only strengthened community bonds but have also facilitated the integration of both groups. These findings underscore the importance of understanding and nurturing intergroup relations to ensure the sustained harmony and prosperity of diverse communities.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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